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**Interagency
Intelligence
Memorandum**

*Indian Ocean Working Group:
Moscow's Approach to a First Meeting*

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INTERAGENCY INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM*

INDIAN OCEAN WORKING GROUP:
MOSCOW'S APPROACH TO A FIRST MEETING

Moscow's initial stance at the meeting could be exploratory, with the USSR doing more listening than proposing, but the initial session length Moscow proposed for these talks--two weeks--suggests that the Soviets have something to table.

The Soviet initial position likely will be linked to an ultimate objective of eliminating Western bases and preventing the deployment of forces which would pose a strategic threat to the USSR, or give the US tactical superiority in local crisis situations. The Soviets will recognize that the USSR has to pay some price, and this will be suggested in their opening proposals. Overall, these will be one-sided and carry obvious potential for propaganda exploitation. The Soviets will nonetheless be serious about this negotiating process, and will be prepared for a long-run effort of orchestrating diplomacy and propaganda pressures toward eventual favorable agreement.

Whatever specifics Moscow suggests are likely to be some variation on positions the Soviets have taken before, and to be introduced in a format considerably less formal than a treaty. One candidate is their 1971 suggestion that the two sides issue a joint declaration that the Indian Ocean be free of military bases and fleet concentrations. This proposal, however, seems to have the disadvantage of limiting all but routine transit activity by foreign navies, and at this stage we doubt that Moscow

* This Memorandum was prepared by an interagency working level group representing State/INR, CIA, DIA, and Navy under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for USSR and Eastern Europe.

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is really interested in banning all outside naval activity in the area. The Soviets share our concern about the dangers of establishing precedents likely to infringe on our respective navies' freedom of maneuver or undermine our respective positions on Law of the Sea.

The Soviets have floated other disarmament proposals over the years that were not made specifically in an Indian Ocean context but which could now surface in these talks. These could include a proposal similar to their oft-reiterated 1963 proposal for the denuclearization of the Mediterranean, or their regular suggestions in years past for an agreement banning foreign bases. These ideas have some relevance to Soviet concerns about US naval plans and intentions in the Indian Ocean region and probably will appear in some form if they propose an Indian Ocean arms accord.

Other issues the Soviets may surface at an initial meeting include reductions in the presence of Western navies in the region and constraints on US air activity.

Basing

The Soviets have made much ado publicly and privately about the potential of Diego Garcia to support a much higher level of US activity, particularly involving SSBNs, carrier task forces, or B-52s. Whatever their ultimate negotiating position may turn out to be, it seems likely that the Soviet opener will involve US abandonment of Diego Garcia. Moscow will choose to read President Carter's public references to "demilitarization" of the Indian Ocean as affording them opportunity for sustained pressure on basing.

For their own part, the Soviets probably will not back off from their insistence that their facilities in Somalia do not constitute a base. They may, instead, as Foreign Minister Gromyko suggested during his recent visit to India, try to trade off their own level of deployments, which is greater normally than our own, for restrictions on

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US use of Diego Garcia. The recent drawdown in the Soviet naval presence in the area almost certainly is related to the upcoming talks.* It may reflect Moscow's willingness to trade off the level of their ship presence for their other objectives.

Nuclear Weapons

The Soviets are well aware that the US can launch a nuclear strike at the USSR from the Indian Ocean and that the USSR cannot hit the US from the area. In the late 1960s and early 1970s their statements reflected concern that the US would deploy ballistic missile submarines to the area. (They even approached the Indians about the possibility of establishing an underwater submarine detection facility in India.) That concern seems to have abated in recent years only to be replaced by worry about US carrier deployments to the area and about Diego Garcia's potential for supporting nuclear armed B-52s. It seems very unlikely, therefore, that the Soviets will let the talks go very far without some proposal for banning the deployment of nuclear weapons in the region.

Allied Navies

The Soviets also will not wait long to make an issue of the presence of other Western navies in the region. It is unclear how much the Soviets worry about this activity, but they are unlikely to agree to any limitations on their own activity that does not take into account the naval presences of France, Britain, and Australia. We doubt that they will propose moving the talks into a multilateral forum. They may, rather, approach the issue as they have in the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks by talking about the

* In recent weeks the Soviets have reduced their Indian Ocean ship presence from a normal average level of 20 to 15. For the first time in a number of years they do not have a surface warship larger than a frigate in the area. In addition, their maritime reconnaissance aircraft in Somalia left after only a two-week deployment. Almost all other similar deployments have lasted for at least three weeks.

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principle of equivalent security, or they may be more explicit. Recent French involvement in the Zaire-Angola conflict doubtless underscored for the Soviets the importance of taking at least the French presence in Africa more seriously.



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How Recent Developments in the Region May Impact on Soviet Behavior

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Recent developments in Africa, however, cut both ways for the Soviets. On the one hand, there is the temptation of promising prospects for securing more shore facilities as a result of Moscow's courtship of Ethiopia and Mozambique. On the other hand, the Ethiopian regime is fragile and Moscow's courtship of Ethiopia may endanger the Soviet presence in Somalia. Both of Ethiopia's ports are in the disputed

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province of Eritrea and are unlikely to be secure at any time in the foreseeable future. Both also need development before they would approximate the port facilities now available in Somalia. Finally, neither is as well situated geographically to support the kind of naval and reconnaissance activity the Soviets now conduct in the Indian Ocean.

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At the UN General Assembly last fall Foreign Minister Gromyko put Moscow publicly on record in favor of talks on ways to realize Sri Lanka's proposal that the Indian Ocean be declared a "zone of peace," but Gromyko's support was conditional and seems to have been given primarily to keep the USSR ahead of the US in the propaganda arena. The Soviets have done nothing to bring about these talks.

From Moscow's viewpoint, a case can be made against an effort to set arms limits in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet navy presumably does not welcome negotiations that threaten any restrictions on its activities in the area. Many Soviet officials probably argue for the need to protect Soviet lines of communications in the Indian Ocean, to meet the long-term challenge posed by Soviet competition with the Chinese, and more recently, to profit from seemingly promising opportunities in southern and eastern Africa. Beyond that, the navy and others would object to negotiations while the USSR is in an inferior bargaining position vis-a-vis the US, particularly if France, which maintains a large permanent naval presence in the area, is excluded from the talks. Other elements in the Soviet bureaucracy probably join in arguing that accepting special restrictions for the Indian Ocean could seriously erode Soviet positions at the Law of the Sea conference and on freedom of the seas.

Those arguing the opposite case also have useful points to make: the virtue of responding to the littoral's position and the usefulness--given the SALT stalemate--of broadening the bilateral agenda on arms control. They can also cite the desirability of limitations that would forestall further development of US capabilities in the region. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Soviet arms control experts pushed for limitations in the Indian Ocean on grounds that this was necessary to prevent the US from deploying ballistic missile submarines to the area. More recently, they have emphasized Washington's potential for supporting a much higher level of naval activity as a result of the expansion of Diego Garcia and the securing of additional landing and overflight rights in support of the US maritime reconnaissance effort.

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